DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 031 716 CG 004 134

By-Riccio, Anthony C.
The Counselor as A Social Reconstructionist.
Ohio State Univ., Columbus. School of Education.
Pub Date [69]
Note-20p.
EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$1.10
Descriptors-*Change Agents, *Counseling Effectiveness, *Counselor Training, *Social Responsibility, *Student Needs, Vocational Counseling

Much literature is developing saying that counselor educators and the counselors they prepare must become agents of social reconstruction. For by attempting to alter society in terms of what they know to be the persistent needs of youth, they will make it much easier for the counseling process to be effective. Three assumptions need to be made in considering the counselor as an agent of social reconstruction: (1) a definite relationship must exist between what a counselor preaches and what he is, (2) there must be a willingness of others to listen to the arguments that the counselor can be more effective if he participates in social reconstruction, and (3) the environment in which the counselor lives and works will permit him to function as an agent of reconstruction. Evidence to support these assumptions include: (1) the development and use of the Columbus Testing Profile, (2) the involvement of counselors with businessmen to set up a program in vocational education, and (3) work being done jointly by vocational educators and state guidance supervisors. Much work remains, however, in the areas of testing and providing quality education for all. Before reconstruction can happen, counselors must be convinced change is necessary. (Author/KJ)

EDO 31716

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

The Counselor as a Social Reconstructionist

Anthony C. Riccio
Professor of Education
The Ohio State University

There has prevailed for some time in educational circles the notion that it is extremely important to know the why of things as contrasted to the how of things. Theory has been deemed far more important than practice. Status has been accorded to theoreticians; scorn has been heaped upon those members of the campus community--except for physicians of one kind or another--who were essentially concerned with practice. As an exercise in the pursuit of academic snobbery, the theory stress has had few negative consequences. But as members of the campus community have become involved far and wide as consultants on the social problems besetting the nation, the potential consequences of the focus on theory at the expense of practice has consequences that are potentially damaging, especially in the national effort focused upon improving the economic potential of disadvantaged youth in an attempt to win the war on poverty.

It has always seemed to me that far too many professorial types who are primarily concerned with theory express little interest in applying their theories to the problems confronting mankind. They are interested in academic gamemanship; they are not especially interested in alleviating human misery or elevating the human spirit.

CG 004134

If there is any validity to the statements made above, then an interesting problem confronts counselor education. What relationship should exist between the theoretical postures of counselor educators and the counseling practices of the students whom they prepare to work in school and agency settings?

Several sociologists who have looked at the development of the guidance movement have come to the conclusion that the preoccupation of counselor educators with the individual qua individual as contrasted to the individual as a member of a complex societal situation with a demanding and sanctioned set of circumstances is close to being irrelevant in contemporary America. The basic criticism of these sociologists appears to center on the notion that guidance personnel should be essentially concerned with the individual in <u>situation</u> rather than with the individual in isolation.

A body of literature is beginning to develop which suggests that counselor educators and the counselors they prepare must become agents of social reconstruction. For by attempting to alter society in terms of what they know to be the persistent needs of youth, they will make it much easier for the counseling process to be effective. How effective is that counseling which assists a youth to arrive at a course of action that dooms him--because of societal sanctions--to a life of

continual frustration? On the other hand, if the counselor helps to bring about a society in which due cognizance is given to the characteristics and legitimate needs of counselees, there is every reason to believe that the outcomes of counseling activity will be aided and abetted.

In fact, the theoretical orientation of a counselor educator and the disciplinary components of his own preparation--both preservice and inservice--will in no small measure influence if not determine the manner in which he defines the problems he deems worthy of attack. As Haberman has noted:

> "Researchers and writers define the disadvantaged using a variety of conceptual schemes. Sociologists concerned with group behavior and interaction tend to use concepts related to the process of alienation. The means by which selected individuals become detached from their primary groups and the processes by which subgroups become disaffected and move into conflict with the majority group are a major emphasis of those who study alienation. Psychologists and others whose major unit of study is the individual rather than the group are more likely to utilize the concept of dependency than alienation in delimiting the disadvantaged.

> Educators, forced to focus on symptoms rather than causes, will more likely use a term like 'nonachieving.'[1]

A relevant concern to be dealt with in this paper then is what is an appropriate posture to be assumed by a counselor educator who is interested in having his students function as counselors who will help disadvantaged youth to become advantaged youth, youth for whom success in contemporary America will become a reasonable probability rather than an undreamed-of goal.

As I have thought about my responsibility to help my students become agents of social reconstruction, I have decided that I must find answers to two questions:

1. What assumptions must I make if I decide that counselors should become agents of social reconstruction?
2. Is there any evidence that counselors can indeed be successful agents of social reconstruction?

A. Assumptions. To adopt such a significant posture that the counselor should indeed become an agent of social reconstruction forces the counselor educator and the counselor to challenge some basic notions which have prevailed in the field of guidance and counseling for some time. For example, since the period of dominance of Rogerain thought

in guidance and counseling, the notion that one set of values might be superior to another set of values has been a repugnant thought. At the same time, however, that leaders in guidance and counseling have blanched at the notion that some values were far superior in twentieth century America to other values, they have conducted themselves in an entirely different manner from their preachments. Counselor educators, by and large, have done what most middle class Americans have done. They have attempted to work diligently, to get as much education as they were able to master, to earn as much money as possible so that they might reside in an attractive home in an outer city or suburban environment with good schools, which, in turn, might enable their children to become exposed to and enamored of early in life the basic middle class values which counselor educators have been pursuing for some time. The difficulty of course is that counselor educators, especially Rogerians, have for some time been leading an incredibly schizoid existence. They have spent much of their professional time railing against the harmful aspects of the imposition of middle class values in America and have spent the remainder of their time striving mightily to lead middle class lives. They have done this at the same time that they have preached the necessity of congruence between thought and action for the well-adjusted personality.

The first assumption I have to make when discussing the possibility of the counselor educator becoming an agent of social reconstruction is

that it is possible for the counselor educator to be congruent, to establish a definite and demonstrable relationship between what he preaches as a counselor educator and how he lives as a human being. I realize that this is a massive assumption. The assumption certainly cannot be verified unless the counselor educator is capable of conducting a thorough examination of conscience--with or without assistance.

I have conducted such an examination of conscience--without assistance--and have come to the conclusion that certain things I believe,in, I believe in so thoroughly that I cannot do otherwise than attempt to communicate the importance of these beliefs to my students. For let us never forget, that the counselor is simply a teacher with specialized training beyond the level of teacher certification--and that both are agents of socialization. I further concluded that for me to have an impact on my students I must indeed demonstrate to them that the life style I am recommending to them is one I am capable of following and indeed am following myself.

What are these values I believe in so strongly? <u>Essentially, they are middle class values</u>!!!

1. I believe that every American should get as much education as he can possible profit from. I believe it is the job of the counselor to help every youth share this belief and to help every counselee get as much education as possible. Clearly, education is relevant to our

increasingly technological society.

2. I believe that every American should prefer to work--if possible--to doing something other than work. I believe that counselors should focus much of their activity in helping counselees to share this belief and further should help the counselee to acquire the experiences necessary to be able to secure a productive position in our employment structure.

3. I believe that every American should prefer to be healthy to being other than healthy. I believe that counselors should support, for example, hot lunch programs for needy youth, as well as tax-supported programs for dental and medical care.

4. I believe that positions on social issues should be based on hard research data whenever possible. This belief implies that I must share with my students data I have gained from relevant reading. For example, do not the increased educational requirements demanded by industrial concerns have implications for counselees who are contemplating early marriage? Is there any relationship between age at time of marriage and the level of occupational placement of one or both marriage partners? If there is, does the counselor have an obligation to communicate the relationship to his counselees?

5. I believe that human misery and social injustice should be obliterated in America, the most bounteous Nation on the face of the earth. I believe that counselors should do their utmost to alleviate

human misery and correct social injustice in their work settings and in their local communities.

6. I believe that the individual as individual is becoming less important in contemporary America and that man must be able to get along with his fellow man if he is to be relevant in contemporary society. The counselor must realize that if he is to have an impact in his work setting he must learn to relate effectively with his coworkers. I do not believe that it is necessary for him to dilute his personal or professional integrity to achieve this end.

7. I believe that people involved in such helping relationships as counseling and teaching have a calling that is comparable to a divine calling. I believe it is their solemn duty to help improve society by being in the vanguard of society--not by simply performing what they perceive to be the will of a majority of their constituents who are essentially concerned with preserving the status quo.

8. Finally, I believe that all Americans must regain a vision of the tremendous importance of the public school in America as the single most important vehicle for making it possible for the downtrodden groups in this Nation to find their place in the sun and in so doing acquire their rightful share of the bounty of this land.

The second assumption I must make is that my colleagues and my students are at least willing to listen to my arguments that the counselor

can become a much more effective counselor if he participates in social reconstruction. Few people who have listened to my arguments that the counselor become an agent of social reconstruction have disagreed with me that as our society becomes more open with respect to such things as increased career opportunities for minority group youth, many more alternatives become legitimate outcomes of the counseling process. Many, on the other hand, have disagreed with me on the matter of the inculcation of the beliefs I have expressed earlier. In fact, on several occasions individuals have demanded: "Who do you think you are--God?" I really hate to have such questions asked, since I have a tendency to answer in the affirmative. But do we not really believe when we work with youth who are perhaps fifteen or more years younger than we are that we have not learned anything in these years that we believe should be communicated to our counselees? Are we fooling ourselves when we maintain that we don't really care what course of action a counselee decides upon just so long as he has made his own decision? Certainly, the final decision on any matter is going to reside with the counselee, but I think the counselor who fails to share with the counselee data acquired from reading and from personal experience relevant to a counseling concern is guilty of negligence. Let us be honest with ourselves and with our counselees. We do care what kind of decisions they make. And further, we each have a notion of what is a more desirable or less desirable solution to a problem presented by a counselee.

The third assumption I must make is that the setting in which the counselor works and the community in which he lives will permit the counselor to function as an agent of social reconstruction. In the not-too-distant past, this would have been an invalid assumption. But in view of recent Supreme Court decisions, teacher militancy, and clerical concern with the social gospels, more counselors will indeed be permitted if not encouraged to become agents of social reconstruction. For the beliefs listed earlier in this paper are certainly in harmony with basic historical documents and social legislation in our country. In fact, it is somewhat amusing to watch the scurrying efforts of professors and school administrators interested in presenting a favorable image to funding agencies to hire minority group members to fill slots with some visibility attached to them. How can a work setting punish a counselor who is attempting to live up to the expressed goals or operating policies of the work setting itself?

B. Evidence. Many of the recent decisions which have come forward from the Supreme Court have been objected to by some people because the decisions they felt were influenced strongly by evidence presented and witness given by social scientists rather than by legal experts. In fact, it has become commonplace for social scientists and educators to be in the forefront of much of the recent social legislation in this Nation. On the local scene many school counselors and counselor

educators have helped to bring about many social changes which have increased broadly the quantity and quality of counseling alternatives now available to counselees. The examples to be cited below all deal with Central Ohio because I am most familiar with the situation in this setting and have been intimately involved as Chairman of the Education Committee of the Columbus Urban League with bringing about some of these changes.

1. One of the most significant educational developments in Columbus in recent years is the development and use of the Columbus Testing Profile. This profile makes it possible for school counselors to share with interested parents a graphic portrayal of the student's performance on standardized measures. When parents have this knowledge, they are in a position to work hand-in-glove with the counselor in determining and reinforcing what the counselor, counselee, and parents believe to be legitimate expectations of the counselee. The Columbus Testing Profile was developed by counseling personnel in the Columbus Public Schools after a group of parents became quite concerned that they had relatively little knowledge about the educational potential and performance of their children and how their children might best be encouraged to prepare themselves for meaningful participation in the American Dream. The parents were supported in their concerns by social work personnel in neighborhood groups in the presentations of their concerns which were

expressed to the Columbus Board of Education.

2. The Columbus Leadership Conference, a group of downtown business and professional men, were concerned that many students were leaving school without an adequate appreciation of the employment opportunities which prevailed in Central Ohio and the requirements for taking advantage of these opportunities. A counselor educator worked with this conference in setting up and meeting with appropriate board of education members and school officials and a plan is now in operation in the Columbus Public Schools which introduces students by group guidance methods to a consideration of local employment opportunities and the requirements of same. Materials for this program were also developed by guidance personnel. The only reservation I have about this program is that many classroom teachers are viewing it as simply another burden placed upon their already weary shoulders. Ideally, to my mind, such a program should be handled by the counseling personnel in the several schools. They should be more qualified to handle this task by reason of training than are teachers.

3. Another example of effecting social reconstruction is the work being done jointly by vocational educators and state guidance supervisors in establishing and publicizing the need for increased opportunities in vocational education for Ohio youth. Members of these two divisions of

Ohio government have in no small fashion made it possible for a curricular choice in vocational education to become one alternative to be considered in a vocational counseling session. (Parenthetically, I might also note the fine work being done by our guidance supervisors in teaching school counselors how to administer and use the General Aptitude Test Battery.)

4. One of the most impressive aspects of guidance programming in Central Ohio is the exceptionally comprehensive presentations made in Career Days and Higher Education Days. Counselors and counselor educators in our region have done a good deal to help secondary school students in Central Ohio to become aware of many careers of possible interest to them. Many of these programs have former students of the school make career presentations to show that such careers are certainly within the realm of possibility for students attending these programs.

5. Perhaps the most dramatic example of effecting social change in our area did not involve, to my knowledge, either a school counselor or a counselor educator, but rather of all things, a researcher in the vision institute at Ohio State. This professor was shocked that minority group members were not employed on a construction project at the university at which he was employed. He played a major role in filing a suit to halt construction until the discrimination was halted. A number of University

personnel testified that minority group youth who knew that they would have difficulty being employed as construction workers could not entertain such careers as viable alternatives. The suit was won--despite the strong opposition of labor forces--and construction work is now an alternative that all youth might consider in counseling sessions.

The incidents related above all give positive testimony to the fact that social change can be brought about by interested people--but there is still room for much improvement in our metropolitan community. Let me cite a couple of examples. The Columbus Urban League has as one of its major functions helping youth secure employment. Yet we have a list many pages long of recent high school graduates in our community who have been unable to pass the simple employment examinations administered by industries in our communities. What is most distressing about this list is that the Urban League comes into contact with a small percentage of the graduates of our high schools. I am certain that counselors at the Ohio State Employment Service have also come into contact with many high school graduates who cannot pass simple employment examinations. The matter of course is compounded by the evidence cited in the Motorola Case that there is little relationship between performance on employment examinations and ability to perform on the job. I am not interested in finding fault with our schools and teachers in this matter. I want to

know why counselors have not established programs to coach students to pass these examinations. Certainly, we all know enough about testing to know that students can learn to become test-wise. Would not such coaching increase the effectiveness of counseling in both our schools and our employment agencies?

Another area in which much work remains to be done in our community centers on the concept of providing quality education for all of our students. Since almost every piece of educational legislation passed in the last ten years has made some provision for the use or preparation of counselors as vital instruments in the war on poverty, it appears clear to me that the Congress of the United States sees counselors as being agents of change. I am not only talking about school counselors, but also about counselors who work in state and federal agencies. What is the obligation of the counselor who finds his agency accused of racial discrimination in counseling and placement functions? What is the role of the school counselor when he realizes that programs of compensatory education have been abysmal failures and that the results of experiments in which inner city students have been transported to outer city schools on a quota basis have been unbelievable promising? Should he exercise any pressure or give any testimony as to what kind of programs are needed to provide quality education or counseling his school or agency should be involved in? I think so. In fact, to do otherwise is to deny himself the right to be called a professional.

In the last two paragraphs, I have tried to outline briefly some of the work that can be done locally by counselors who view themselves as agents of social reconstruction. But reality demands that we recognize that social reconstruction does not come about overnight. One of the major differences between the educational researcher and the educational practitioner is that the researcher can wait for all the data to come in before he makes recommendations but the practitioner cannot put his clients on ice until he has sufficient data in terms of which to act. He must engage in action at the same time that he is gathering data, acquiring insights, or attempting to reconstruct society. The counselor must continue to work with individual clients while he is engaged in social reconstruction. Such being the case, what is the legitimate posture of the individual counselor who is interested in helping disadvantaged youth to become advantaged? Is there any counseling approach which offers much hope for success in this quest? I think there is. I have been tremendously impressed by the work being done at Stanford by Krumboltz[2] and his students. These people have attracted a considerable amount of attention because in their research and writing they have emphasized doing something about specific counselee behaviors, have focused upon observable behaviors, and have compelled us to examine some of the treasured shibboleths which have been with us for a number of years.[3] They have studied test-anxiety, decision-making behavior,

and information-seeking behavior. They have insisted that we demonstrate conclusively that counseling can make a difference. Krumboltz has stated that "counseling goals need to be stated as those overt behavior changes desired by the client and agreed to by his counselor. The counselor has an obligation to share in the determination of the client goals and would not be expected to work toward goals which were outside his interests, competencies or ethical standards."[4] It is readily apparent that Krumboltz expects the counselor to assume much more responsibility for what transpires in counseling sessions than have many other writers in the field. It is my belief that Krumboltz is terribly relevant to the needs of twentieth century American youth and to all recent Federal legislation calling upon the counselor to help make our society a great society.

Let me explain. It seems to me patently clear that some of our youth appear destined to be losers in contemporary society; others appear to be almost certain winners. A relevant question for counselors is what can be done to help almost certain losers to become probable winners. I think that we have to examine the differences between probable winners and probable losers and then try to eradicate the differences between the two groups by remaking the probable losers to the image of the probable winners. The question, to my mind, is not whether we should do this, but rather <u>how</u> we can do it. This is what Krumboltz

and his students have done. They have focused their work on how the laws of learning might be applied effectively to the specific problems defined by the counselor and his client. They appear to have restricted themselves to trying to produce specific changes in the behavior of clients, changes, however, that are requisite to becoming more relevant in contemporary society.

Effecting change in the behavioral patterns of counselees is, in a way, social reconstruction in microcosm. The counselor is in effect reconstructing the phenomenal field of the counselee. But before the counselor can even think of becoming a social reconstructionist in the broader sense, he must be convinced that change is necessary in our society. This conviction must involve more than an intellectual commitment--it must be a gut-level commitment acquired by personal experience with the children of the poor in their own community setting as well as in the school or agency setting. For when the counselor experiences the lives of the poor, he can then and only then be willing to make sacrifices to help them desire to improve their condition. It is only then that the counselor will give personal witness to the need for change; only then that he will be able to say with DeMott:

> ". . . There are some things on earth that must be changed and that will be changed. They simply must and simply will. . . You know for the first time that certain events must occur

> and that you and others are going to make them occur, or at least are going to work to make them occur. You see that revolution is not a word but a pointing toward what obviously, absolutely must happen, and you are lifted up by this sight, by the freshening awareness of how criminally wrong a wrong can be <u>known</u> to be. . .'[15]

If counselors are indeed to help shape the great society, they must be capable of feeling for their counselees what DeMott felt for his students.

REFERENCES

1. Martin Haberman, "Guiding the Educationally Disadvantaged" in Carlton E. Beck (Ed.), Guidelines for Guidance. Dubuque, Iowa: W. C. Brown, 1966. P. 48.

2. John D. Krumboltz (Ed.) Revolution in Counseling: Implications of Behavioral Science. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1966.

3. Harman D. Burck, "The Counseling Revolution: Promises and Problems," Guidance Journal, (in press).

4. John D. Krumboltz, "Changing the Behavior of Behavior Changers," in Anthony C. Riccio and Garry R. Walz (Eds.) Forces for Change in Counselor Education. Washington, D.C.: Association for Counselor Education and Supervision, 1967. P. 222.

5. Benjamin DeMott, "Encounter in Mississippi," Saturday Review (January 20, 1968), p. 65.